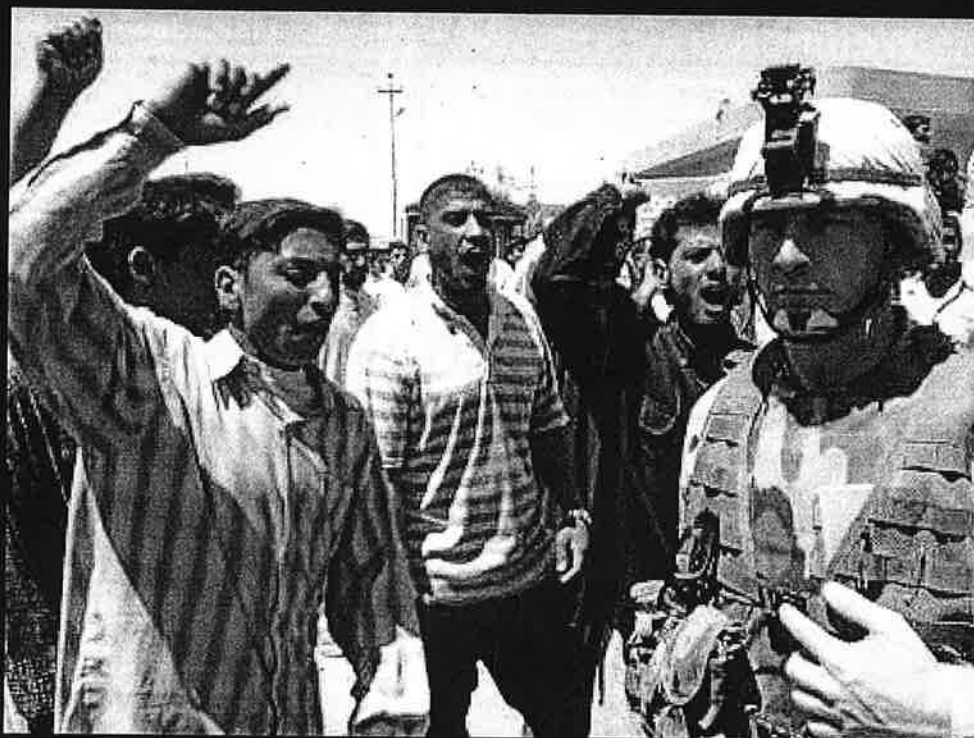


Socialist Review

Aotearoa/New Zealand

For a socialist and democratic alternative

Issue 15 Winter 2003 \$2



Occupation is not liberation

U.S. out of Iraq!

labour and the war • police and protests • a colony by any other name • can the us be stopped?

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Meets every Thursday at 6.30pm in the
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For details email us or phone Dougal (04) 475-7133

Dunedin

Meets every Thursday at 7.30pm at the Clubs & Societies Building,
84 Albany St. Phone (03) 472-7473 for details

Invercargill

Phone (03) 218-2226

Australia

Contact Socialist Alternative at info@sa.org.au
or write to P O Box 4354, Melbourne University,
Parkville, Vic 3052, Australia Website www.sa.org.au

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editorial

It was right to protest

The anti-war movement didn't oppose the war on Iraq because we thought the US would lose. Neither did we expect the protest movement to somehow "convince" Bush, Blair and Howard not to go to war. And the reasons for opposing the war didn't change once it had started.

In fact, every reason for standing up against the war has been proven correct by the US victory – from the fact that there are still no signs of "weapons of mass destruction," to the growing Iraqi resistance to the US occupation.

But the corporate media's abysmal coverage of the war has distorted these facts for millions, which is why many people – even those who protested against the war when it began – now have a mix of ideas. Some, for example, are confused about what to say about the US occupation. Others accepted the media's stage-managed pictures of Iraqi celebrations of "liberation" and now wonder whether the war at least accomplished some good.

So the first job of the anti-war movement after the war is to cut through Washington's lies and tell the truth – just as we did before. There are still widespread doubts about the Iraq war – and opposition to Bush's openly stated plan to use Iraq as a stepping stone for more wars in the Middle East and beyond. But many people don't know what they can do about this. That's why it's crucial that anti-war organisations maintain activity that can give a voice to this opposition.

For one thing, the US attack on Iraq isn't over. It has just entered its next phase – a brutal occupation – and we have to respond to all of its injustices and horrors. Just as importantly, it will be vital to have organisational continuity for the next time the US goes to war – so that activists trying to stop a new slaughter won't have to reinvent the wheel to build a new movement.

A core of people became determined opponents of the US war machine as a

result of the struggle against the Iraq war. This core can maintain the fight against the occupation, while strengthening our ability to challenge the next US war.

This involves not just holding together an activist core, but taking any opportunity available to oppose the US occupation of Iraq and Bush's wider war plans.

To help arm activists with some ideas to take into this struggle, this issue of *Socialist Review* looks at the aftermath of the war and why it was right to oppose it; we also examine Labour's duplicitous stand on the war – and how workers stopped World War I.

No one expects the anti-war movement to draw the tens of millions worldwide that it did in the run-up to the war, or the nearly equal numbers who protested as the invasion started. But we can build a movement that gives voice to the widespread questioning and anger at Washington's war makers and their policies – and the fake opposition of our own government. ■



www.iso.org.nz

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For the latest meeting details,
Socialist Review articles,
resources and cool links!

Time for a new fees fightback!

An angry crowd of protesters greeted the Associate Education Minister Steve Maharey at Victoria in late May after news Labour was planning massive fee hikes for tertiary students. This protest – along with other recent ones in Christchurch and Dunedin – are significant not just because they're the first major actions against attacks on tertiary education for several years, but that they're also aimed at a Labour Government.

Although nominal fees have always been charged, it was the Fourth Labour Government that introduced higher fees and the loans scheme in 1990. At that time, there was a flat fee of \$1300 though with many exceptions for those from low income families, for example.

Labour and then National initially adopted a reasonably clever strategy – first introducing fees but with various exemptions, then imposing much higher fees on the most poorly organised groups of students – international students (who had been paying full fees for some time) then Dental and Health Science students.

But in 1993 they made a big mistake – an attempt to impose roughly 30 percent across the board fee increases sparked big angry protests at many campuses. At Otago, on September 28, a mob of police in full riot gear stormed out of the Registry building and savagely beat up a group of students sitting on the steps waiting for news of fellow students arrested at a demonstration earlier in the day.

This attempt at repression backfired badly, and 1994 saw absolutely massive demonstrations against fees and the loans scheme. Badly frightened, the National Government commissioned the Todd Report to try and give the fee increases some air of legitimacy.

Coupled with this, the universities, in particular Otago, had developed much more sophisticated tactics for dealing with the protest movement by the mid-90s. Instead of sending in the riot squad, university administrations made a pretence of listening to students' concerns, setting up useless student-management committees and trying to place the blame for fee increases solely on the government.

Why fees?

After World War II the universities expanded enormously as the post-war economic boom demanded skilled technicians, administrators, teachers and scientists. Throughout the boom, the state was willing to meet most of the cost of tertiary education because big surpluses gave it room to manoeuvre, just as it was able to grant workers concessions in terms of social welfare and a public health system.

But as the economic crisis that began in the 1970s bit deeper, rulers in New Zealand (and elsewhere) attacked living standards through benefit cuts, "user pays" and, of course, making students pay to gain the skills needed by the system. It's important then to understand that fees are part of a much bigger attack, and fighting them involves fighting the whole neoliberal agenda as well.

Unfortunately the majority of student leaders in the 1990s failed to make this

connection. For most of that decade we were told by them to put our faith in university management and vote for an "education-friendly" government. Well, we've got our "education-friendly" government all right – and it's about to impose a fee *increase* as big as the total yearly fees it introduced in 1990!

The key to winning this time lies in recognising that our rulers (whether "education-friendly" or not) and the university bosses are not our friends, that we will have to have bigger, more militant and coordinated protests involving staff-student strikes and occupations, and most importantly, that we need to link up with workers, beneficiaries, Māori and all the other victims of the last 19 years. ■

Andrew Cooper



Labour and the war

What's going on here? First the Labour Government becomes the US's "very, very, very good friend," sends combat troops to Afghanistan and warships to the Middle East, gets a high powered group of American senators to back a free trade deal – then – after some off-the-cuff comments about the slow progress of the war made by Helen Clark at the end of a press conference in March, extraordinarily strong (in diplomatic terms) criticism comes from Washington, forcing Clark into a humiliating apology and backdown – and almost immediate promises of "peace-keeping" forces for post-war Iraq.

Clark finds herself attempting an extremely delicate balancing act internationally: On the one hand, the New Zealand ruling class desperately wants to secure a free trade deal with the United States. Just before she made her comments in March, 19 US senators had written to President Bush urging him to sign a free trade agreement with New Zealand, arguing that NZ should get the deal because of its "major contribution to the campaign against terrorism," (despite the fact that Labour claims trade and "security" issues are kept separate).

But on the other hand, the ruling class has to consider its relations with the European powers outside Britain – especially France. The ferocious falling out of France and to a lesser extent Germany with the US and Britain may

not quite signal the opening shots of World War III – but it does mark the beginning of a significant realignment in international power relations.

As well, Labour has been forced to take strong opposition to the war within New Zealand into account.

Until Clark's comments, it was actually managing to do this surprisingly

humanitarian cover through the UN.

- Labour has been so concerned about avoiding any embarrassment to the US over the war it has used repressive measures against the anti-war movement in New Zealand (see article on page 8).

- But even this – and Clark's grovelling apology – weren't enough. The US was willing to clobber even "very, very, very good friends" who stepped even slightly out of line with the Bush doctrine – in

New Zealand's case by ditching the free trade agreement.

- Labour's difficulties centre around a desire to create a balancing act between the US and Europe – in the midst of developing rivalries between the European Union (except Britain) and the US.

Labour claimed it opposed the war. But it is now committed to sending military forces to an Iraq under US occupation. Labour was never opposed to the end – occupying Iraq for Western interests – but simply to the means. ■



well – thanks largely to widespread illusions in the United Nations (allowing "not supporting the war without UN approval" to sound like an anti-war statement) as well as the complete lack of media scrutiny over just what the hell the frigates were doing in the Arabian Sea.

Putting aside the diplomatic jargon then, several key points emerge:

- Labour never "opposed" a war against Iraq – they simply preferred to give it a



United Nations gives its blessing to occupation of Iraq

A colony by any other name



If it wasn't obvious already, the US is now the official occupier of Iraq. On May 22, the United Nations (UN) Security Council approved – by a 14-0 vote – a resolution giving the US and its sidekick Britain the authority to occupy and “rebuild” Iraq.

So much for Germany, France and Russia's opposition to the US-led invasion a few months ago. “The war has taken place,” French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin told France Inter radio. “Now it's time to restore the unity of the international community.” In reality, European leaders are trying to “restore” their hands on some of the loot from post-war Iraq – and the price for that was

throwing their support behind a resolution that gives UN blessing to the new US oil colony.

A major point of the resolution was the lifting of economic sanctions, which were imposed on Iraq 13 years ago after Saddam Hussein's regime invaded Kuwait. Over the last decade, the embargo destroyed what was left of Iraq's infrastructure after the 1991 Gulf War's punishing air campaign. Activists around the world fought long and hard for ending the deadly sanctions.

But it was pure hypocrisy for some Security Council members to spout their

“concern” for the Iraqi people as a justification for backing the resolution. “[W]e cannot undo history,” said German ambassador Gunter Pleuger. “We are now in the situation where we have to take action for the sake of the Iraqi people.”

What a fraud! The suffering of the Iraqi people didn't matter to the war makers in Washington until they wanted to exploit Iraq's oil wealth, and it didn't matter to other world leaders either – until it seemed that they might be cut out after the US takeover. When news of the end of sanctions reached Basra on May 20, residents celebrated, according to Alex Renton, of the aid group Oxfam.

But there's more to the story. That same day, "doctors and nurses demonstrated at the United Nations and at the British military base," Renton wrote in Scotland's *Sunday Herald*. "Their banner read: 'Restore security, water and electricity, or all the doctors and nurses will go on strike.'"

Judging from the occupation so far, the last thing that the US government should be in charge of is the future of the Iraqi people. Hospitals are still in chaos, and food and clean water are scarce. Yet the US government, with all its vast resources, hasn't lifted a finger.

With the country plagued by poverty and hunger, conditions are ripe for looting and violence. And the worst gang by far is the US military.

In April, in the city of Falluja, west of Baghdad, US troops fired on anti-occupation demonstrators twice in one week, killing at least 15 people. Then in

late May US troops were at it again in Falluja, firing tank shells indiscriminately around the city and forcing their way into people's homes after US soldiers were fired on. "They went crazy, they fired everywhere," Safi Jaber told Reuters.

In the oil-rich city of Kirkuk in northern Iraq, residents got an idea of what Washington means by "democracy" during local elections. "In preparation for the vote, US forces surrounded the city hall with tanks and spools of barbed wire," the *Washington Post* reported. "Iraqis whitewashed the building, hung up red, white and blue bunting – and then took it down, because those are not the colours of the Iraqi flag." And when Major Gen. Ray Odierno entered the torpid auditorium, the delegates were instructed to stand."

From the delegates who voted to the candidates they voted for, the US called the shots "We know who is running the

show," one attendee told the *Post*. Just to underline the point, US officials announced that they were pushing back the timetable for Iraqi self-rule. "We are talking about sometime in July," said Washington's top dog, chief administrator Paul Bremer, who chose to make this his first order after the UN resolution sanctioning the occupation was passed.

This is what the United Nations is fronting for – a US occupation in which all opposition is met with an iron fist. Washington won't leave Iraq until it has imposed its puppets and exploited the country's oil resources – unless it's forced out. That's why we oppose the US occupation of Iraq – with or without UN permission. ■



Clampdown on protest movement

The movement against the war on Iraq was truly inspiring. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets, with demonstrations in Wellington being the biggest since the anti-nuclear protests of the mid 1980s – and the most militant since the 1981 Springbok Tour.

This militancy has been matched by the desire of the police to do all they can to intimidate, attack and undermine the anti-war movement. So far, over 30 people have been arrested in connection with anti-war protest action in Wellington this year. Some of the more ridiculous charges have been dropped, but most are still before the courts.

Two Wellington anti-war activists – Paul Hopkinson (a member of the Anti-Capitalist Alliance), and ISO member Dougal McNeill – were charged after they

burnt Australian and New Zealand flags in Parliament grounds during a peaceful protest against John Howard's visit on March 10. The charges are entirely politically motivated – aimed at frightening people out of protesting and tying up leading members of the anti-war movement in legal defence campaigns.

Paul was charged under the Flags, Emblems and Names Protection Act, a repressive piece of legislation introduced by the Muldoon National government in 1981 as part of its attack on the anti-Springbok Tour movement. The charge against Paul is believed to be the first of its kind under the Act. Dougal has been charged with criminal nuisance after he burnt an Australian flag at the same action.

Two other members of the Anti-Capitalist Alliance were arrested in

connection with the flag burning, and prominent Wellington anarchist Mark Eden was arrested for "obstruction" – as he and Paul were leaving the protest!

The incident itself took place at a loud but peaceful protest attended by around 1000 people. After John Howard had left, police made a series of highly provocative arrests – with police snatch squads grabbing protesters earlier identified as "ringleaders" during the action. The police had made no attempt to arrest either Dougal or Paul earlier, but, as the protest was dispersing, made the highly provocative arrests and then began violently moving people away from Parliament's main gates for no apparent reason other than to create conflict.

The decision to crack down on the protest movement was without question



Above: the peaceful protest against John Howard before police snatch squads made highly provocative arrests (right above and below), leading to clashes as police attacked protesters gathered near Parliament gates (opposite page) [photos on next three pages from www.indymedia.org.nz]

made at a high government level, mainly because Labour finds it diplomatically embarrassing to have several thousand protesters chanting outside Parliament or the American Embassy.

Those arrested have been targeted not because they have encouraged "lawlessness" or "endangered the public" but because they are prominent members of the anti-war movement. After large and completely peaceful protests outside American, British and Australian diplomatic posts on March 20 (attended by several hundred people including Members of Parliament) following the start of the attack on Iraq, members of the International Socialist Organisation were followed by a police car as they walked home and questioned in Lambton Quay.

Two days later, as protesters gathered in Civic Square to march on the US Embassy, a group of police attempted to intimidate Dougal, trying to get him to come along to "answer questions." They backed off when he and other ISO members asserted their rights, but told Dougal he was going to be arrested at the end of the protest. The arrest never happened – but clearly the aim was to

intimidate him and others into not protesting.

Despite supposedly having enough evidence to charge him over the flag burning (and having his address), Dougal was not arrested at this or subsequent demonstrations – the police finally arresting him at his home on April 23 – over a month later.

The charges are particularly serious for Paul. As a provisionally registered teacher, he faces the possibility of losing his licence if convicted. The police tried to bar Paul from entering Parliament grounds or associating with other activists as bail conditions, but a judge threw these conditions out. Police have barred Dougal from entering Parliament grounds.

Any approval to lay charges under the Flags, Emblems and Names Protection Act needs the consent of the Attorney General. In other words, the decision to crack down on a growing and potentially embarrassing protest movement was made at the highest levels – rather than just being some sort of "over reaction" by the police.

Repression often backfires on those using it. Instead of scaring people into submission it makes them angry and determined to fight back. Is it any coincidence that Wellington's anti-war movement was the most militant in the country?

Unless we resist – by supporting those charged in court – and by continuing to build a movement against the American Empire on the streets – it can and will be used as a precedent for repressive action against progressive movements and workers in the future.

George W. Bush wants to make an open ended war on the world. Not only must we build the biggest possible movement to stop him, we have to resist the attempt by our own rulers to repress this movement.

Support the arrested:

For details about donating to the defence fund or supporting the arrested activists in court, please contact Peace Action Wellington:

peacewellington@hotmail.com



Just doing their job?

The role of the police

Many people get their first taste of the unpleasant reality of the police when they go on a protest for the first time. The people you were always told were there to help old ladies across the road, catch criminals and keep the streets safe suddenly appear in a slightly different light as they drag away protesters and lay absurd charges.

Some people try and explain away things like this as being isolated incidents or "over reaction." But the reality is that the police's role is not to act as some sort of neutral force regulating society – the police are not a simple reflection of society, they are a separate force which stands against most people within society – they are a law unto themselves.

The way the police are deployed and what they are there to do constantly reinforces the most prejudiced views and leaves anyone who joins the police force idealistically hoping to make the world a better place isolated. The police have to uphold racist laws – such as the laws over immigration controls.

One of the great myths about the police is that they are there to help ordinary people. But the police exist to protect the needs of bosses and private property – they have little interest in protecting workers, who are the ones who suffer most from crime in NZ today.

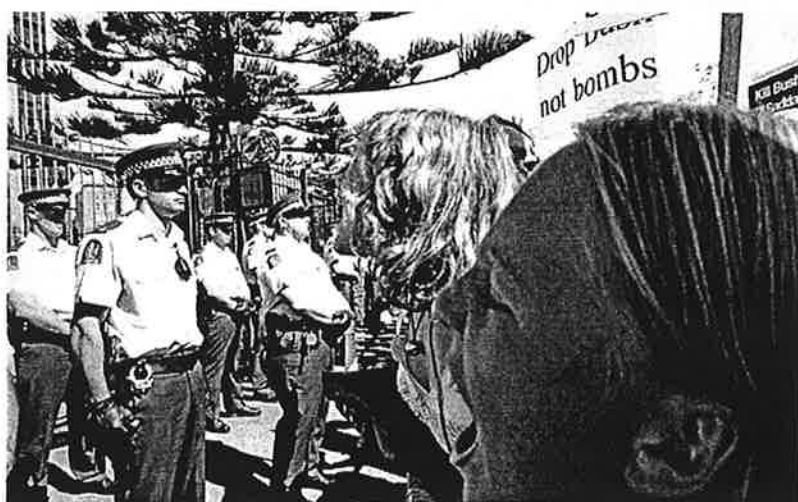
Despite this, it is important for our rulers to have a force that is perceived to be "neutral." Our rulers have long realised it is not in their interests to have a force that is constantly in

conflict with those they were meant to control. It was keen to have a force that would have the respect of most people. They have to persuade the great majority of the population that the state acts in their interests, even while it preserves the property of a very small minority.

There has never been any hesitation to use the full forces available at times of conflict, mass demonstrations or strikes like the 1951 Waterfront lockout or the Springbok Tour, but it has meant an attempt to present a friendly image to the rest of the population, while cracking down heavily on those who threaten the system through organising strikes or protests.

The police are just one part of the state that, along with the courts and the army, is there to do one thing – protect the property of the minority who own it against the mass of the people who do not.

In one sense it's true that the police are "just doing their job" – the problem is that that "job" is to preserve a system based on gross inequality, racism, unemployment and war. ■



Can the US empire be stopped?

The limits of US power

TOM BRAMBLE OUTLINES THE LOGIC AND LIMITATIONS OF AMERICA'S
DESIRE TO MAINTAIN ITS GLOBAL EMPIRE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

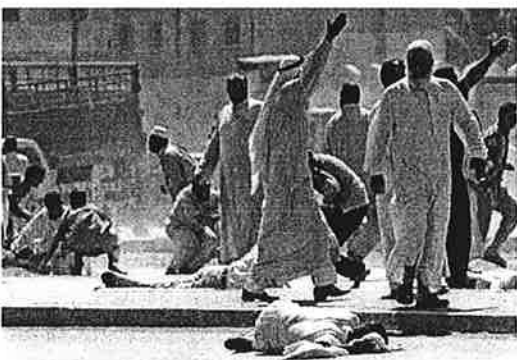


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The US's vast military budget, the technological edge enjoyed by its forces, the presence of bases across the entire Eurasian continent, and the sheer political clout wielded by the US ruling class give the impression that we are witnessing the birth of a new empire. Indeed, such is the self-confidence of the US ruling class that leading figures are now making open comparisons with the glory days of the Roman Empire.

Yet appearances can be deceptive. Although the US is in some ways well placed to try and stamp its authority on the world, its lurch to military aggression is testimony not only to the country's strength but also to its underlying weaknesses. And the more that the US ruling class wages war around the world, the more it is likely to provoke a backlash that could bring it tumbling down.

The Bush doctrine is a recognition of the fact that the US ruling class can no longer dominate the world economically in the way that it did in the decades following World War II. In 1945, the US controlled one half of world manufacturing output; the figure today is only 30 percent. During the course of the long post-war boom, Japanese and European companies in particular took market share once controlled by US multinationals. Since the election of



Ronald Reagan in 1980, US ruling class strategy has increasingly been to use the country's military power to compensate for its long-term economic decline in terms of asserting its domination over rival emerging imperialists.

Set alongside this long-term trend, however, is the stagnation of the economies of the US's great rivals since the early 1990s – Japan has been mired in a ten-year recession, while Germany has experienced only fitful economic growth. Meanwhile, the economic capacity of China, the potential giant of Asia, has not reached the point where it could seriously challenge the United States for leadership of the world economy. The collapse of the USSR, and the consequential unprecedented military dominance of the US has also given them room to manoeuvre. The result is a feeling of self-confidence amongst the US ruling class – it feels that it has a short-term window of opportunity to press ahead aggressively against its rivals.

In particular, military domination of the Middle East and Central Asia will give the US Government control of oil. It will allow the US extra leverage against the rival ruling classes of Japan, China, and the European Union that depend heavily on Middle Eastern oil. Control over the flow of oil will add to the leading edge that the US already enjoys against its rivals in institutions such as the World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund. B-1 bombers and the threat of nuclear first strike allow IBM, Ford, Caterpillar, Citibank and Coca-Cola to secure their interests in a way that "pure" economic competition could not.

Limitations

However, Bush's "solution" to the long-term declining economic prowess of US corporations also points to its own internal contradictions.

The first is economic. The ability of the US to sustain the huge level of arms spending and the expected US\$300 billion budget deficit this year is dependent upon its ability to convince the rest of the world to hold US dollars and buy US government bonds. While this was not a problem in the booming 1990s, when the US economy sucked in large amounts of cash from overseas investors, driving the stock market bonanza of those years, record low US interest rates, the three-year slump in Wall Street, and the burgeoning trade deficit have all undermined confidence in the US dollar, pushing it down by 15 percent against the euro and 10 percent against the yen in 2002 alone. All of a sudden, the ability of the US ruling class to get the rest of the world to foot the bill for its escalation in arms spending is looking shaky. Underpinning these medium-term problems is the long-term decline in the corporate rate of profit, the motor force of any capitalist economy, which is now sinking again after surging in the 1980s and early 1990s.

These economic problems have political consequences for the US ruling class. Even the rumour that the Chinese government would shift some of its assets into euros rather than US dollars sent the dollar lower in January. The vulnerability of the US economy therefore gives the Chinese government leverage against the United States.

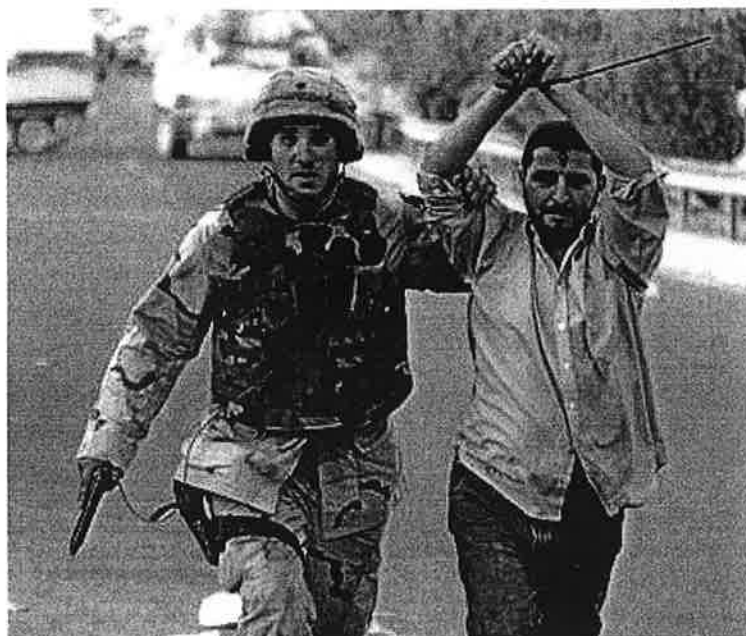
The second major limit to the power of US imperialism is, therefore, competition from rival ruling classes. This is most evident in Europe. Just as the bombing of Iraq is meant to demonstrate the sheer power of the US ruling class to Berlin and Paris, it also raises tensions. Much as Bush and his cronies would like to ignore the French

and German governments, they know that they cannot ride roughshod over Europe's economic powerhouses. They may try to cultivate Eastern European governments, but when push comes to shove it is these two giants that matter. And the ruling classes of these two countries are not going to surrender to the US without a fight: hence their decision to force a month-long crisis in NATO in February over arms shipments to Turkey.

Similarly, although the Chinese and Russian ruling classes are desperate for US foreign investment and access to US markets, they are also aware that Bush's National Security Strategy involves their gradual encirclement on their southern borders by US bases and US puppet governments. China's rulers are also worried that a US triumph on the Korean peninsula would bring US forces right to their border. The Chinese government is therefore using its rapid economic growth to boost its own arms spending, which may potentially threaten US control over the Asian region in coming years.

Then there are the Arab governments, who depend on US military and diplomatic support but who are sitting on top of a tinderbox of rising radical Islamist sentiment, fuelled by Israeli state terrorism and the US attempt to recolonise the Middle East. None of them would be returned to power in a genuinely popular vote, and they increasingly fear that the Islamist force that many once actively sponsored as a bulwark against mass left-wing organisations might now turn against them. Hence the refusal of many Arab governments to garrison US forces for the attack on Iraq this time around.

And finally, the war on terror, far from pacifying the world, only ratchets up military tensions that the US will be incapable of subduing. With "pre-emptive strike" now regarded as a legitimate strategy, the nuclear-armed Indian and Pakistan governments are



itching for an excuse for a war. North Korea is resuming its nuclear programme, as is Iran.

US attempts to enforce its rule as the world's unchallengeable superpower are therefore only contributing to rising military tensions all over the world.

Domestic opposition

The last major limit to US power is domestic. Bush is hoping to use war fever to distract attention from growing social tensions within the US that are on the rise as the boom bursts and as Bush shovels billions of dollars to the country's wealthy elite. The decline on Wall Street is now shredding the pension plans of millions of the US middle class and better off sections of the working class, who now face bleak retirement prospects. And the working class in general faces massive attacks on what is left of the US social security system, alongside corporate attempts to revive share prices by shutting factories and sacking workers. These attacks come on top of two decades of a systematic





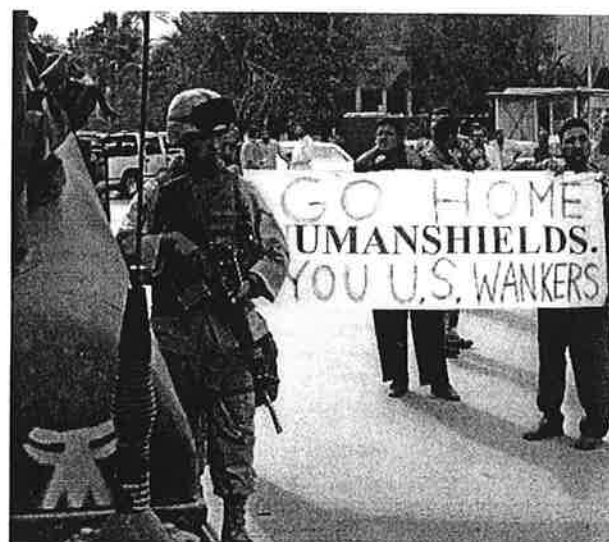
offensive, starting with the election of the Reagan Government in 1980.

Furthermore, if Bush and his generals are going to fight limitless wars, they have to convince the US public to accept thousands of US casualties. Although ten years of "humanitarian interventions" in Somalia, Yugoslavia and elsewhere have softened US public opposition to the deployment of troops overseas, there is no sign that people are ready to accept the return home of large numbers of GIs in body bags. The "Vietnam Syndrome" is still a vital factor in US politics. Additionally, there is widespread revulsion at what is plainly an attack on Iraqi civilians, including the threat of a nuclear strike, for the benefit of oil interests. Opposition to the war within

the US was massive and is only likely to grow with future attacks.

Every step that the US ruling class takes to establish its military might only stores up increasing resentment amongst the US working class who can see the clear political priorities of a government which can find billions for weapons but nothing for health or social security. The last time the US was engaged in a "war until victory," in Vietnam, it had to send in the National Guard to take back the streets of Detroit and Los Angeles from rioting African-Americans. The same social tensions that underpinned the riots exist today, but this time the African-Americans may well be joined on the streets by whites and Hispanics sick of 20 years of sacrifice and austerity.

The new Bush doctrine heralds the attempt by the US to totally dominate the world. But even after a decisive victory in Iraq the US ruling class faces ongoing problems and opposition on many fronts. A resumption of its relative economic decline. A rise in social instability as protests grow, both directly about US military adventurism, and indirectly by workers and the poor angry at being made to bear its cost. The unravelling of the old alliance with the major European powers. And increasing military tensions with and between medium-level powers, possibly leading to a nuclear exchange. Everywhere the US turns, it is faced by the reality, not only of its power, but also of its limitations. ■





The 1918 German Revolution

How workers stopped a war

by Dougal McNeill

In the aftermath of Bush and Blair's murderous war on Iraq, it's easy to become demoralised at the state of the world. After all the protesting, all the millions of people coming out against this war, the hideous still happened, and the terrorist in the White House seems determined to try something similar again, and soon. That's why the history of the German Revolution is so important and inspiring for us today. The lessons of 1918 show how ordinary working people can – and have – brought an end to war and slaughter. The successes and the failures of the German Revolution are vital lessons for anti-war activists today.

Perhaps for this very reason the German Revolution has been almost totally written out of history. The wonderful record of this revolution that ended World War I has been hidden from official histories and largely lost to radical traditions. But the German working class almost took power and – for a brief but important period – were central to the wave of revolutionary upheavals that swept across Europe.

Tragically the reasons for the failure of the revolution were caught up in events well before the rebellion itself had started. To understand these we need to look at some background to the situation in Germany.

Background

World War I did not come like a bolt from the blue – for many years the socialist movement had been speaking out against the rising militarism and competition between the big empires that ran the world. At this time, the German Social Democratic Party (SDP) was far and away the biggest and most important socialist party in the world. It had a million members, hundreds of clubs, associations, choirs, sports teams and societies for its members, something like 90 daily newspapers and hundreds of full time organisers and officials. The SDP was committed – in rhetoric at least – to a revolutionary, socialist and Marxist overthrow of the capitalist system. It was a force to be reckoned with.



Revolutionary soldiers in 1918 (above and below)

Impressive as all this might seem, all was not well within the SDP. For many years currents had developed within it that, although they might mumble revolutionary phrases on May Day marches, were committed to maintaining the existing order. The SDP had become like a "state within a state" and increasingly, this elaborate party machine became more important than the goals of revolution itself.

There were genuine revolutionaries within the SDP – grouped around Rosa Luxemburg – but, unlike Lenin and the Bolsheviks in Russia, they did not try and build a separate, uncompromisingly revolutionary organisation. Luxemburg saw political arguments *within* the SDP (as the party of the working class) as the role

of revolutionaries and, again unlike Lenin, she did not understand the importance of organisation: of gathering together the most class conscious, determined and political workers into their own party to fight reformism and nationalism within the workers' movement. This misunderstanding would have tragic consequences for the German working class, and for Luxemburg herself.

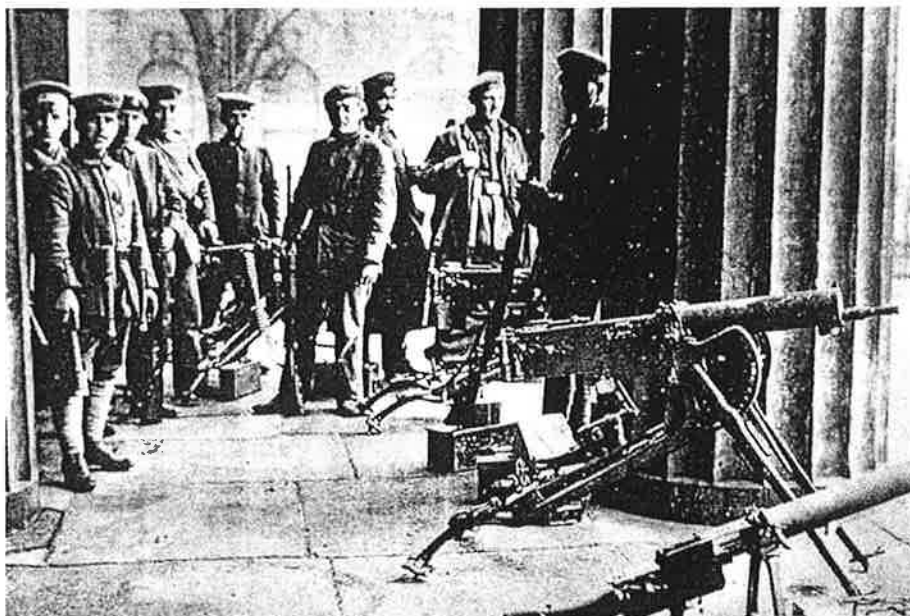
Because, come August 1914, all the revolutionary pretensions of the SDP collapsed into the carnage of WWI. The SDP abandoned its commitment to the internationalism of the working class and supported Germany's rulers in the war. The workers of Germany – like the workers of Britain, France, New Zealand and elsewhere – fell for their rulers'

nationalism and enlisted to fight in the trenches. SDP deputies in the Reichstag (the German Parliament) voted, with two courageous exceptions, to grant money and credits for war. Luxemburg and her tiny number of supporters were utterly isolated, trapped within a party now openly pro-war and with almost no means at their disposal to present socialist anti-war arguments.

After the initial burst of enthusiasm for nationalism, the sufferings ordinary Germans were forced to endure began to undermine the pro-war politics of both the SDP and the ruling parties. Anti-war demonstrations began to occur. Luxemburg captured the change brilliantly in a famous pamphlet:

The scene has thoroughly changed. The six weeks' march to Paris has become world drama. Mass murder has become a monotonous task, and yet the final solution is not one step nearer. Capitalist rule is caught in its own trap, and cannot ban the spirit it has invoked. Gone is the mad delirium. Gone are the street demonstrations...

These first expressions of working class opposition to war stumbled, however, as there was no clear political organisation to provide leadership or an alternative. Luxemburg and the revolutionaries' failure to build a party of their own was having terrible consequences. As the war dragged on and the pressure grew the SDP



split. The anti-war opposition in the SDP was expelled in 1916 and went on later to build the Spartacist League. This process was painfully slow and difficult, with the official "foundation" not until November 1918. The experience of Luxemburg and her supporters is an important lesson for today: it is too late to start building a revolutionary organisation once a revolutionary situation has begun. It is vital to begin the process early and to be able to enter the situation with *at least the embryonic form* of such an organisation.

The war machine cracks...

Anti-war feelings amongst German troops were given a huge boost by the Russian Revolution of 1917. The October Revolution in Russia – which passed power into the hands of workers, peasants and soldiers – began dropping leaflets and newspapers to German soldiers on the Russian front. There was civil unrest against the continuing war as well, and in late January 1918 over one million workers in 50 different cities staged a general strike against the war. By March 3 Soviet Russia had signed peace with Germany.

The German military and ruling class were becoming desperate with the situation, both at home and in the war against the Allies. In November the navy at Kiel were ordered out on a suicidal mission against the British fleet... and the sailors refused to fight! The naval mutiny quickly spread and, within days, workers had taken control of Kiel and many other major German cities.

As is always the case with revolutions, the situation spread incredibly rapidly. By November 7 the Bavarian monarchy was overthrown, workers' and soldiers' councils controlled large sections of Germany and – on November 9th – the Kaiser was ousted. Two days later World War I was over. The revolution was triumphant.

Or was it? In the last days of the Kaiser's reign the Spartacists had called for a general strike to further the revolution. November 10th saw hundreds of thousands of workers and soldiers streaming into Berlin shouting revolutionary slogans. The old rulers were

desperate. In an attempt to try and keep some sort of control over the situation they replaced the Kaiser with Ebert, a leader of the SDP.

Ebert knew that to restore order he had to try and win some sort of breathing space from the crowds of workers in Berlin. Appearing at the Reichstag he announced the "German Republic." Just metres away Karl Liebknecht, a leader of the Spartacists, was declaring the socialist republic of Germany a reality.

November 11 saw a wave of revolutionary enthusiasm throughout Germany. All the symbols of the old order were smashed and mass meetings, marches and workers' assemblies debated the issues of the day. The red flag was flying, and an atmosphere of euphoria and power was everywhere.

Beneath the surface of the workers' victory, however, were more complicated problems. These first moments of revolutionary enthusiasm were not to guarantee the decisive defeat of the old order. Most workers sitting on the factory councils, passing resolutions and marching in the streets were entering into politics for the first time and, despite the treacherous record of the Social Democrats during the war, they turned at first to the SPD for leadership. Again, because Luxemburg's forces had not been building a revolutionary organisation in the years leading up to 1918, there was no coherent force of militants to offer leadership. So the SDP was in the position of keeping the revolution under control (with Ebert as head of government) and being seen as its leader!

Spartacus Days

The situation was volatile: the SDP government needed to restore order for German capitalism to function, but on the streets the Left's control and influence was growing. There were mass uprisings, strikes and demonstrations throughout Germany and, on January 1st, the Spartacists merged with other revolutionary forces to found the German Communist Party (KPD).

When it was founded the KPD was tiny, with perhaps only a few hundred



(Top) Rosa Luxemburg;
(Above) Friedrich Ebert

members and hardly any roots in the working class. But its growth and control seemed, in the first weeks of 1919 at least, unstoppable. The government knew they had to regain control and, sacking a police chief elected during the workers' revolution, they managed to engineer a confrontation.

By sacking Eichorn (the police chief) the SPD provoked a massive response from Berlin's workers. A general strike began and around 250,000 workers marched through central Berlin. It seemed as if a new, decisively socialist, phase of the revolution was about to begin. The workers had ended the war, would they end the government?

Tragically, January 1919 proved yet again the importance of organisation. Luxemburg knew the workers of Berlin were in no position to question state power for the whole of Germany – but the KPD and the Spartacists were too small and lacked the organisational credibility to be able to argue successfully against a premature uprising. There was nothing for them to do but join with the rebel workers of Berlin.

The uprising was easy for pro-government forces to crush. The *Freikorps* – a counter-revolutionary volunteer force who paved the way for the Nazi gangs – entered Berlin and used the failed insurrection as a pretext for a total offensive against the Left. On January 15 Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered, and the *Freikorps* unleashed a terror on the whole working population of Berlin.

The first phase of the German revolution had ended in defeat and the murder of two of its most brilliant leaders. But it would take German capitalism several years – and several further near revolutionary situations – to stabilise to even a slight degree.

The 1918 Revolution is an example of both inspiration and warning. It is an inspiration, showing us how ordinary working people can end wars and bring hated governments crashing down. But it is also a warning. The failure of Luxemburg and other revolutionaries to



Bavarian Freikorps members

even begin building a revolutionary organisation before a revolutionary situation had broken out left them isolated and the revolution in danger. The failures of 1918 left Russia alone, and indirectly facilitated the horrors of Stalinism and, with the failure of the revolutionary movements in Europe, the rise of Hitler. We need to learn from both the inspiration and the warning in our tasks today: working for a world without war, and building an organisation capable of winning it. ■

Further Reading

Obviously this is a very complex history, and I have only managed to give the barest of outlines. Chris Harman's *The Lost Revolution* is an incredibly useful history and a good place to go for what happened after 1919. Also, Mary-Alice Waters has edited a collection of Rosa Luxemburg's writings, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*. Luxemburg was one of the great Marxist thinkers, and her articles are still of enormous use. Recommended. Also, Tony Cliff's *Rosa Luxemburg* is very helpful. Most of these books should be available at university or public libraries.

Israel: from dream to deathtrap

[PART ONE]

A militarised state, a society under arms, besieged, but simultaneously the jailer of a millions strong indigenous population who are political prisoners and economic serfs – who are subject to curfews, economic blockades, constant humiliation and intimidation; at risk at any time of extra-legal detention or murder, or even court-sanctioned torture. An economy in crisis, dependent on foreign aid; a society as much divided by its faith as it is united. An immigrant people – European, African, Slavic, Arab – united by fictional ethnicity but divided by the pall of racism that hangs over the Holy Land. This is what has become of the dreams of Zion.

In part one of a three part series, *Mike Tait* looks at the origins of Zionist theory and its practical implementation as another colonial enterprise. The next two of articles will deal with Israel's alliance with imperialism, and the difference between the Palestinian national liberation or the struggle for tino rangatiratanga and Zionism. This article is based on the research of Norman J. Finkelstein. All quotes are from his book "Image and reality of the Israel/Palestine conflict."

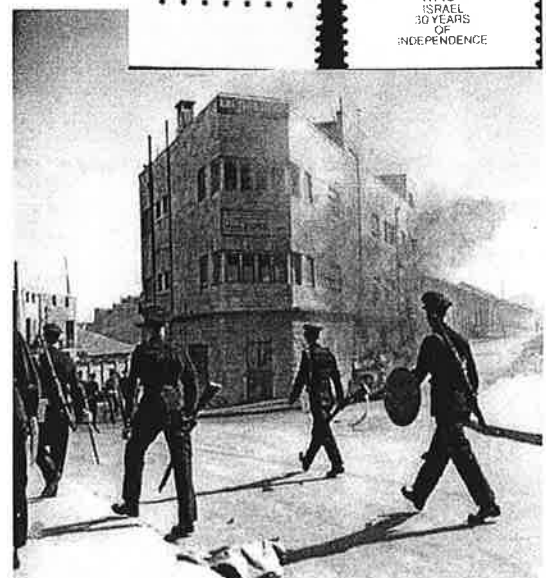
The origins of Zionism

"From the ashes of the Holocaust, the state of Israel was born." This is the popular myth. Reality is, of course, more complex – the leaders of the new state were lifelong Zionists, not Holocaust survivors and a Jewish state in Palestine had been planned and promised by Britain before World War II. But the Holocaust did drive many European Jews to embrace Zionism – previously a minority current in Jewish politics – and swung public opinion in the West behind the project. But the Holocaust and Zionism are more intimately linked than that: they both spring from the same racist version of nationalism that led to Nazism, and to the death trap that Israelis now find themselves in.

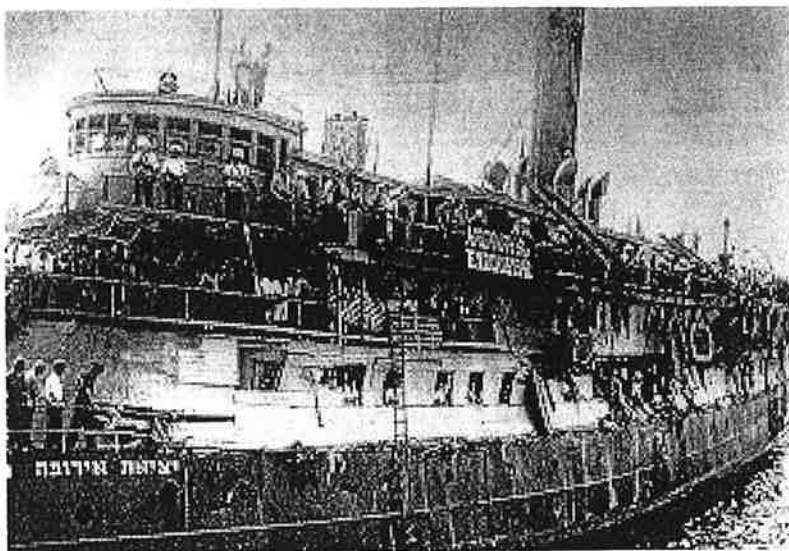
Modern nationalism first emerged in Europe with the French Revolution, as the ascendant urban merchant classes – the bourgeoisie – mobilised popular support to push aside feudalism and absolute monarchy. Instead of the authority of the state coming to the king from God, it was sourced in the people –

the nation. For the French revolutionaries, the state and the nation were based on a mutual contract between free people. Its message and its appeal were universal – French Jews were for the first time admitted as citizens of the state, and the French armies that swept through Europe spread the ideals, sparking revolutionary upheavals and questioning of the old order.

This modern, liberal nationalism was the political ally of Enlightenment ideals such as Reason, Science, and Progress. But these ideals did not go unchallenged. The Romantic movement of the 18th and 19th centuries opposed the ideal of reason with passion and science with nature. Liberal nationalism, with its citizenship by contract, was countered by a Romantic nationalism that saw the



(Above) British troops during the 1948 war;
(Top) An Israeli postage stamp showing Theodor Herzl



nation as a natural, organic unit; with citizens not bound by reason and consent but by the indissoluble bonds of blood and a mystical oneness with the land.

The nation state, according to this idea, could not be neutral or belong equally to all who lived in the country. It had to belong especially to the ethnic group that "belonged" to that land. Hitler's National Socialism was the clearest and most extreme form of this idea. Against the "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" of the French Revolution, he proclaimed "Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer" – one people, one state/land, one leader. Authority no longer came from the democratic will of

the people, but from the mystical national will, which could be expressed by a single, charismatic leader.

But anti-Semitism in Europe existed before modern nationalism. Europe had had a large Jewish minority since the destruction of the Temple in 79 AD and the Diaspora. Like the Gypsies, Jews existed on the margins of the feudal system, a people apart: not allowed to own land, and under the constant threat of persecution. Liberalism, by questioning the religious basis of the state, theoretically opened the state for Jews to participate as equal citizens. However, despite some progress, anti-

Semitism persisted.

Socialists located the source of anti-Semitism in capitalist competition – an attempt by non-Jewish businessmen to handicap their Jewish rivals, and many Jews made great contributions to revolutionary socialism, including Rosa Luxembourg, Leon Trotsky, and of course, Karl Marx. But others, like Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism, saw anti-Semitism as the natural impulse of an organic community that was infected by a foreign body. According to his Romantic nationalism, the only solution to anti-Semitism was for Jews to withdraw from Europe and constitute themselves as a nation with their own state in their own land – in Palestine.

Colonialism

Short of moving to Antarctica, Zionism's goal of a Jewish nation state was always going to involve conflict with an indigenous people. And for an unarmed minority scattered throughout Europe, the aid of an imperial power was always going to be crucial in any conflict. Such an alliance would not come without a price.

Choosing a land to establish the Jewish state wasn't difficult. The religious ties to the biblical land of Israel made it the obvious candidate for a land that Jews could make special claim to – although Madagascar and Argentina were considered. But despite the religious resonance of Palestine, Zionism was a strictly secular project, bitterly opposed



(Above) Vladimir Jabotinsky; (Right) David Ben Gurion;
(Top) The Exodus bringing Jewish refugees to Palestine



Convincing Palestinians to allow this was recognised by the Zionist leadership to be impossible and, where persuasion would not work, force was the only option. The death trap logic of ethnic nationalism, with its vicious circle of violence set in. ■

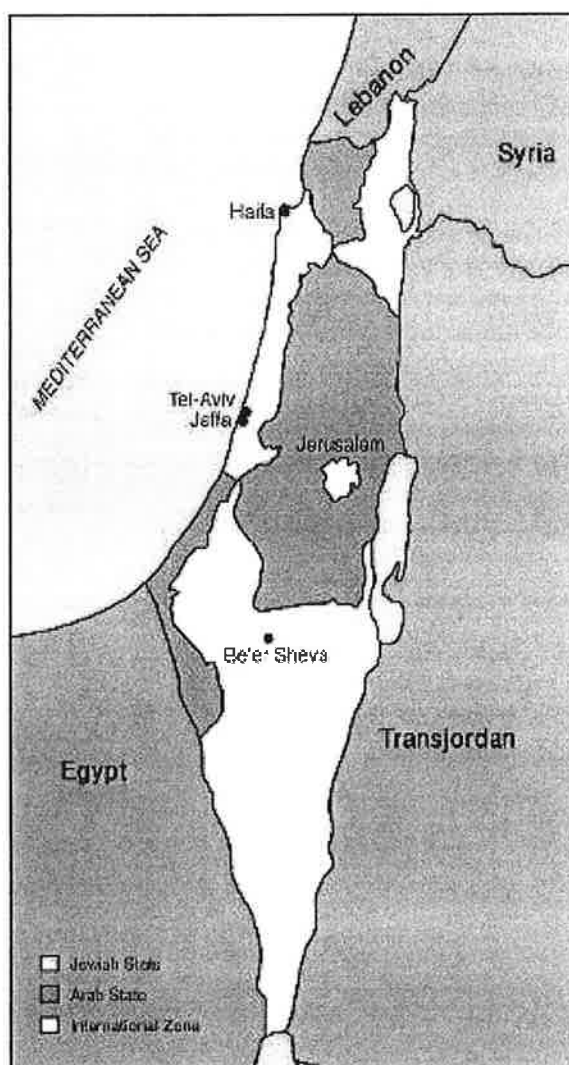
Next article: US imperialism and Arab resistance

by Orthodox Judaism, which saw the project as blasphemy. Zionism was a colonial enterprise similar to all others, which offered Jews, too long cooped up in unhealthy European cities, their own wide, open spaces. Like the myths of Australian, South African, and New Zealand colonialism, Palestine was portrayed as an empty land, roamed over by scattered nomadic tribes.

It was "a land without a people for a people without a land." But this was empty propaganda that was not taken seriously by Zionists who had travelled or settled in Palestine. Yitzhak Epstein in 1905 chided Zionist leaders for "overlooking" the fact that, "In our beloved land there lives an entire people that has been dwelling there for many centuries and never considered leaving it." As settlement increased, Zionism was forced to acknowledge the existence of Palestinian Arabs, but not their claim to the land. They were disqualified from having a special relationship because 1) they were just part of the greater Arab nation, and could be equally at home in Iraq or Egypt; and 2) they had lost their right to the land because they had neglected it.

David Ben Gurion – army general, Labour Zionist, and first prime minister of Israel – described Palestine on the eve

of colonisation as "in a virtual state of anarchy... primitive, neglected, and derelict." Jewish settlements, according to Ben Gurion, revitalised the land, thus proving the mystical connection between the Jewish people and Palestine. Even though Zionism aimed to create a Jewish state, it was nominally democratic, and was not opposed to non-Jews having equal citizenship in Israel. According to Ben Gurion, the Palestinians could have full equality with Jews, but the state would belong to the Jewish people "... in order to bring in masses of Jews from the Diaspora and to assemble and root them in their homeland." As Vladimir Jabotinsky, a right wing Zionist, put it, "the creation of a Jewish majority... was the fundamental aim of Zionism." In other words, the Palestinians would have to be transformed from a majority in Palestine into a minority living on the sufferance of the Jewish majority.



(Above) The UN's 1947 partition plan;
(Top) Jewish troops in the 1948 war

RED WORDS

The other side of the story

The Ballad of Fifty-one

Bill Sewell

(Wellington: Headworx, 2003)

\$19.95.

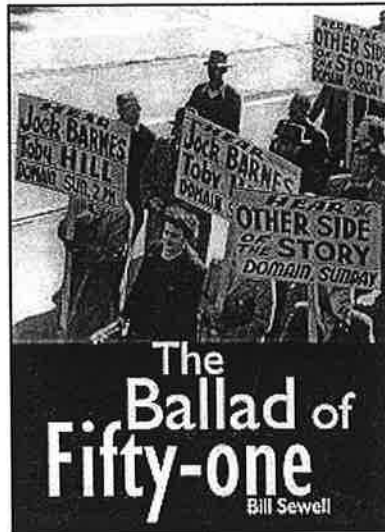
Reviewed by Dougal McNeill

The best political poetry manages its task in the best of both words, its argument so closely bound to the sound and rhythm of the work you can almost stop realising an argument is taking place. Ideas, propaganda, and commitment: in the best works of political verse these are the motivating and driving energies of the art, not some didactic afterthought. *The Ballad of Fifty-one*, a collection of loosely connected poems centred around the 1951 Waterfront Lockout, is a superb example of this type of writing. Published shortly after Wellington poet Bill Sewell's premature death, it is a testament not only to his impressive and considerable talents as an artist but also to the drama and inspiration of the story of the Lockout itself.

These are poems confident of their place in the world and in the struggle. Although there are many minor points to quarrel with in their historical arguments it is obvious they are treasures for our side. In his preface Sewell makes this clear:

These poems make no attempt to be even handed. While they recognise the wharfies were no angels, they place the blame for the crisis squarely where the bulk of it belongs: with the National Government, the employers, and the economic forces they represented.

Sewell captures brilliantly the air of vague menace and escalation leading up to the confrontation, when Holland's National government was determined to smash the Watersiders' Union as a warning for all working people. He writes of the



class tensions, conflicts and misinformation informing the seemingly quiet and conservative 1950s, where "beneath the sand, under the skin / something is rank and it smells to high heaven" ("High Summer"). For Sewell, post-51 New Zealand is left "in an innocence that reeked / of guilt" ("The Legacy"), and the lies, violence and basic attacks on democratic freedoms which the government employed to beat the watersiders all receive savage treatment in satirical poems.

The jargon and official phrases of repression all get their proper treatment – quoting Holland that there is an "enemy within" Sewell goes on to define this enemy as "your next door neighbour... / with his cabbages"! ("The Enemy Within"). As the Bush regime and its cronies turn language for their own ends over the "war on terror" these poems make topical reading.

The Ballad of Fifty-one is by no means socialist literature, and Sewell's claim that Jock Barnes had "his head in the sand" ("Fuzz") is historically questionable to say the least. But these poems are inspired by a marvellous sense of anger at the unjust depictions of watersiders, which still have currency today. Playing with the still

common idea that the workers were lazy one poems ends that the work was "easy as... / falling off a log. / Or being felled by one" ("Easy Money") and the scumbag cartoonist of the *New Zealand Herald* gets a poem all to himself with the wonderful stanza:

No wonder that forty years after
the fact
we scooped up the same lies,
applauding the objectivity he
lacked
and its rollicking disguise
("The Cartoonist").

Some of the poems relying on full rhyme and regular metre are a bit too obvious to enjoy, and Sewell can over-egg the pudding with metaphor and "blokey" speech. But he is capable of some wonderful lines ("a twist in the tide, the slop of the swell" stuck in my head, "By Ships We Live"). There are also fun moments, and some familiar lines of verse get quoted in clever ways. Sewell turns phrases upside down in "Modes of Resistance" where "Not I but another / scooped down in the hold" and "let time be still" is followed by the – perfectly reasonable – modification of "or at least stretch in to overtime."



Bill Sewell

The Ballad of Fifty-one is a brilliant example of the kind of verse our side needs – filled with a sense of history but alive to the impact and importance of the present, political but not preachy and, above all, entertaining in its examples of the pleasures learning and thinking offer us in the struggle to understand and change the world. New Zealand literature has lost a powerful and exciting talent. ■

just what **are** your politics anyway?

The more observant among you may have noticed that this magazine's politics aren't quite the same as the mainstream media's. So just where do we stand? Below are some of the basic political ideas behind our magazine.

Socialism Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need.

Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over its production or distribution. A new society can only be built when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and create a new state in which they will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.

Workers' Power Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want.

Liberation can be won only through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power – a new kind of state based on democratically elected workers' councils.

China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have nothing to do with socialism. They are repressive state capitalist regimes. We support the struggles of workers against every ruling class.

Revolution Not Reformism Despite the claims of Labour, Alliance and trade union leaders, the structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class.

They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against workers.

There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

Internationalism Workers in every country are exploited by capitalism, so the struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle.

We oppose everything that divides workers of different countries. We oppose all immigration controls.

We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation struggles.

Liberation From Oppression We fight for democratic rights. We are opposed to the oppression of women, Māori, Pacific Islanders, gays and lesbians. These forms of oppression are used to divide the working class.

We support the right of all oppressed groups to organise for their own defence.

All these forms of liberation are essential to socialism and impossible without it.

Tino Rangatiratanga We support the struggle for tino rangatiratanga.

Māori capitalists and politicians have no interest in achieving tino rangatiratanga for working class Māori.

The Government and corporate warriors' approach to Treaty claims has benefited a Māori elite while doing little for working class Māori.

Tino rangatiratanga cannot be achieved within capitalism. It will only become a reality with the establishment of a workers' state and socialist society.

Revolutionary Organisation To achieve socialism, the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by day to day activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

We are beginning to build such a party, linking the ideas of revolutionary socialism to workers' struggles against the system. If you agree with our ideas and want to fight for socialism, we urge you to join us.

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